

NSC BRIEFING

29 September 1960

LAOS

- I. The top military commanders from the rival camps of Premier Souvanna Phouma and of General Phoumi and Prince Boun Oun, meeting yesterday (28 September) in Luang Prabang, agreed to a cease-fire pending the outcome of a full-dress political conference which is to begin within five days.
- II. King Savang had for two weeks been pushing for a military commanders' conference, as a means of breaking the impasse which threatens the dismemberment of Laos, but had been unable to induce Phoumi to come to Luang Prabang.
 - A. Phoumi finally bowed to pressures from a number of sources, including his uncle, Marshal Sarit of Thailand.
 1. Phoumi's military reverse at Pakxane--his troops were driven from there by Captain Kong Le's paratroopers--probably also a factor.
 - B. Moreover, Phoumi's supply and financial positions are extremely weak and he may finally have decided that he cannot retake Vientiane.
- III. Pathet Lao forces which have been advancing on the town of San Neua, with its airfield, since about the first of the month, are reported to have occupied town and airfield vital to defense of San Neua Province.
 - A. The three-battalion garrison is now out of radio contact with Phoumi's headquarters in Savannakhet.

B. Situation clouded by fact that Vientiane radio claims that the Second Military Region, having jurisdiction over Sam Neua, has now swung from Phoumi to support of the Vientiane government.

1. It is possible that, following this revolt, some deal was made with the Pathet Lao.

IV. Whatever happens in Sam Neua, any political compromise between Souvanna and Phoumi will be difficult to bring off.

A. Phoumi almost certainly will demand resumption of the paramount role he played in military affairs prior to the Kong Le coup, an arrangement which probably would be unacceptable to Kong Le.

Kong Le, with his Paksane success, will cast a long shadow on the conference even though he will probably not attend.

B. Another problem, if Souvanna's resignation is demanded as military leaders reportedly plan to do, will be the selection of a mutually acceptable new premier.

C. In the realm of policy, the disagreement on how to deal with the Pathet Lao and on Laos' international orientation will have to be resolved.

1. King is said personally to favor return to pre-coup policies of militant anti-communism at home and a pro-Western stance abroad.

2. Return to these policies would be unacceptable to Kong Le, however, and unpalatable to Souvanna.

V. Even if a new patchwork compromise is worked out in Luang Prabang, there is no guarantee that the contending factions would live up to it.

- VI. Perhaps the greatest danger is the possibility that the political talks might fail, followed by the declaration of a separate state by Phoumi and Boun Oun in southern Laos.**
- VII. The Souvanna government, meanwhile, has taken a first step toward carrying out its pledge of greater neutrality by suggesting to the Soviet ambassador in Phnom Penh that he also be accredited to Laos.**
- A. Souvanna had previously indicated to American officials that he would probably stop short of establishing relations with Asian Communist states but that he would try to reduce relations with South Vietnam from the ambassadorial to the consular level and to remove the Chinese Nationalist consulate established in early 1959.**
- B. Implementation of these plans is, of course, subject to the outcome of the impending political conference.**